I HAVE HAD THIS BOOK FOR OVER 35 YEARS IT WAS HANDED DOWN TO ME BY MY GREAT UNCLE JOSEPH JAMES RATTI. HE ALWAYS TOLD US KIDS WE WERE RELATED TO A POPE WHEN WE WERE LITTLE AND HE GAVE ME THE BOOK TO PASS ON TO FAMILY, BUT NOW I CAN PASS IT ON TO ALL WHO HAVE AN INTEREST! I HAVE ADDED LITTLE EXTRAS AND LABELED THEM AS EXTRAS, PHOTOS, AND BRIEF HISTORY OF THE POPE. I HOPE EVERYONE AND ALL WILL ENJOY.

PIUS XI

1922 - 1939 AD

Achille Ratti, like Pius X, had parents who were just plain folks. Born at Desio on May 31, 1857, he went to the seminary at Milan and then on to the Gregorian University to take his doctorate in theology. After a few years in a parish, Father Ratti was put to work at the Ambrosian Library in Milan. Here he made such a reputation that Pius X in 1912 made him assistant librarian at the Vatican and soon after head of the great Vatican Library. Scholar that he was, Ratti was no pale bookworm. He was an expert, indeed something of a champion, in a difficult and dangerous sport, mountain climbing.

In 1918 Benedict XV sent Ratti from his research to serve first as visitor and then as nuncio to stormy Poland. For a scholar in his sixties to go on his first diplomatic mission to a country coming to life after over a century of partition was something of a task. But the old historian successfully handled a situation perplexing enough to trouble a supreme court full of Solomons. He showed courage too. When other diplomats fled before Trotsky's onrushing Red Army, Ratti remained to hear the thunder of Soviet guns in threatened Warsaw. He had the satisfaction of seeing the heroic Poles strike back and rout the Communists.

In 1921 Benedict made Ratti a cardinal and archbishop of Milan. A few months later Benedict was dead and Ratti succeeded him. He chose the name Pius XI.

Pius XI faced a sadly disturbed postwar world, a world threatened and tempted by fascism and communism. Far from yielding to discouragement Pius strove mightily to rally the forces of good and to remedy the times' evils. To remind a materialistic world of the primacy of the spiritual, Pius established the beautiful feast of Christ the King. In thirty encyclicals he shed light on the difficulties of the day. Outstanding were his encyclicals on education, marriage, and above all, on the social problem.

Though he fought manfully for principle, Pius was quick to extend the hand of friendship, and his pontificate is notable for a whole series of concordats. The outstanding event of this kind was, of course, the Lateran Treaty of 1929, which put a long-desired and satisfactory end to the Roman question.

Pius XI deeply appreciated the oneness of mankind. He ardently fostered mission activity and was eager to see native clergy, headed by native bishops, take over as many mission fields as possible. In what has been called the Magna Carta of the missions, Pius allowed certain customs which, once open to superstition, had become secularized with the centuries. He was keenly interested in the separated Eastern churches and yearned for reunion with them. His great heart was angered by base attacks on the Jews, and he bluntly told the world that to be antisemitic was to be un- Christian. It is characteristic of the man that one of his first acts was to continue feeding starving Russians in spite of Soviet ingratitude, and one of his last was to lash out at racist laws.

Pius had much sorrow. He grieved over the sufferings of his children in Mexico, Russia, Spain, and Germany. But he was not soured. Just before he died on February 10, 1939, Pius offered his life for the peace of the world.

CLIMBS ON ALPINE PEAKS

BY

ABATE ACHILLE RATTI

Mountaineer ~ *now* Pope Pius XI

CLIMBS ON ALPINE PEAKS

Abate Achille Ratti, Mountaineer

(NOW POPE PIUS XI)

Both the interest of the subject and the eminence of the author give to this book an unusual and world-wide interest. In the days before his walks were confined to the gardens of the Vatican His Holiness was a famous scaler of peaks. As Father Achille Ratti he contributed several articles to the Journal of the Italian Alpine Club, and these not only show his prowess as a mountaineer, but also his thoroughly human love of sportsmanship.

His book contains an account of his first Italian traverse of Dufour peak, an ascent of Monte Rosa from Macugnaga, the first traverse of Colle Zumstein, and his ascent of the Matterhorn direct from Zermatt, and of Mont Blanc via the Rocher, with descent by the Dôme Glacier. His Holiness narrates his experiences and adventures with both scientific accuracy and literary charm, conveying to the reader the feel of high altitudes and the sense of wide Alpine views with great vividness.

Illustrated

CLIMBS ON ALPINE PEAKS

BY

ABATE ACHILLE RATTI

Mountaineer ~ now Pope Pius XI

THE PUBLISHERS HAVE BEEN AUTHORISED
TO TRANSLATE THESE ARTICLES BY HIS
HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI AND TO PUBLISH
THEM IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Pius PP. XI

CLIMBS ON ALPINE PEAKS

BY

ABATE ACHILLE RATTI

Mountaineer (now POPE PIUS XI)

TRANSLATED BY

J. E. C. EATON

WITH A FOREWORD BY

DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD

AND AN INTRODUCTION BY THE

RIGHT REV. L. C. CASARTELLI

Bishop of Salford

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INTRODUCTION

THE Publishers of this most interesting volume — equally interesting for its subject-matter and for the personality of the author — have done me the honour of asking me to write a few words of introduction. "Good wine needs no bush," and, in any case, I feel that I have no particular qualifications to undertake such a task, particularly after the illuminating Foreword of so eminent an Alpinist as Mr. Douglas Freshfield. For I am not an Alpinist in any sense of the word — though I do look back to a delightful holiday at the Schwarzsee and the Hörnli, referred to by the illustrious author of the following essays. Perhaps the only claim I have to speak at all is that I was, as I believe, the first to translate into English from an Italian review some extracts from the description of his climbs by the then Abate Ratti, which were reprinted in 1921 when he was made Archbishop of Milan. The writer I have had the privilege to know personally since his visit to Manchester in 1900 and subsequently at the splendid Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan, that noble creation of the illustrious Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, so familiar to readers of Manzoni's immortal *Promessi Sposi*. For if Don Achille Ratti was in the front rank of Alpine climbers, none the less was he in the front rank of librarians, whether in his beloved Ambrosiana, or, subsequently, in the Vatican Library.

However, I have been asked to say a few words on the biography of the first Alpinist Pope, though I think the remarkable career of Pius XI is pretty well known through many articles in the press. It has been my good fortune to spend many happy days in the small, busy manufacturing town (or large village, if you prefer) of Desio, a few miles outside of Milan, with its fine domed parish church and its busy silk weaving and dyeing works. In this little town on March 31, 1857, was born Achille Ratti, whose father was connected with one of the great silk concerns just referred to. His earliest education he owed to an uncle, a pious and learned priest, to whom he has always referred with sentiments of veneration and gratitude. Early called to the ecclesiastical state, he continued his studies, first in the Seminary of his native diocese and subsequently in the Lombard College of Rome, greatly distinguishing himself and taking high degrees. He was ordained priest in 1879, and said his first Mass in the Lombard Church of San Carlo in Corso, and then returned to begin his priestly career in Milan. For many subsequent years of strenuous labour he lived a life which may be described as one of triple activities, carried on with almost passionate enthusiasm: that of the scholar, a profound and brilliant cultivator of historical and palæographical sciences, and particularly an enlightened and indefatigable librarian; that of the intrepid and yet thoroughly scientific Alpinist, as revealed in the subsequent pages; that of the pious and earnest pastor of souls, particularly devoted to the spiritual care of the young, including the poorest children of the great city under the care of the good religious of the "Cenacolo," which he served as chaplain for over thirty years.

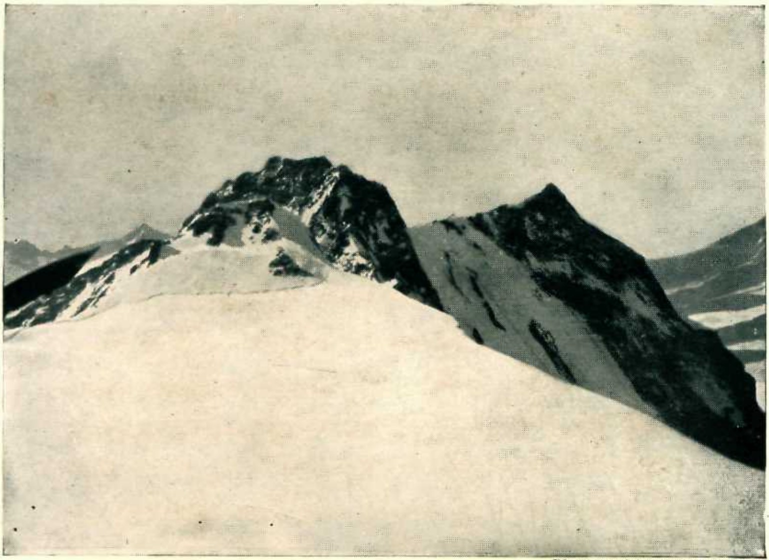
In the Library he was at first assistant to the eminent Orientalist, Ceriani, whom he eventually succeeded as Prefect. As such, he entirely reorganised that invaluable treasure-house of books and works of art. I shall not touch upon his many publications on various subjects of history and palæography, because they are fully treated by the writer of the first chapter of this book. (The late Benedict XV, when creating Monsignor Ratti a Cardinal in 1921, after his return from his diplomatic mission, with a gentle humour almost worthy of his predecessor the fourteenth of that name, referred to His Eminence as a "diplomatico," in the double sense of the Italian word — our "diplomatist" and an archival scholar.) His brilliant work in the Ambrosian led to the Pope calling him to Rome to the famous Vatican Library, where he at first worked under Cardinal Gasquet, and then under Father Ehrle, S.J. (since created by him Cardinal), and eventually as himself head of the Library. If Rome and its Library put an end to his Alpine climbing, his sudden transfer by Benedict XV in 1918 to diplomacy, as Apostolic Visitator and afterwards Nuncio to Poland, put an end to his career as Librarian. Three years later he was recalled by the same Pontiff from his brilliantly successful diplomatic career to undertake the pastoral charge of his native diocese, that of Milan, one of the largest in the world, with over two million souls, in succession to the late saintly Cardinal Ferrari, and simultaneously was created Cardinal, June 13, 1921.

The rest is known. Within seven months Pope Benedict was carried off after a few days' illness, and not many days later, on February 6, 1922, Achille Ratti was elected Pope by the Conclave and took the name of Pius XI.

His elevation to the Papacy has not destroyed his love of Alpinism, though it has for ever cut him off from its pursuit. Nothing has given him greater pleasure than the courteous greeting from the Mount Everest Expedition. And when he lately received the handsome illustrated report of that famous deed of mountaineering, he sat up quite late at night reading it. The Himalayan climbers, also, had the graceful idea of sending to His Holiness a fragment of rock broken from the highest point which they reached, handsomely mounted in silver, with the names of all the expedition engraved on a plate, and enclosed in a mahogany case. This memento Pius XI greatly values — a photograph of it lies before me as I write.

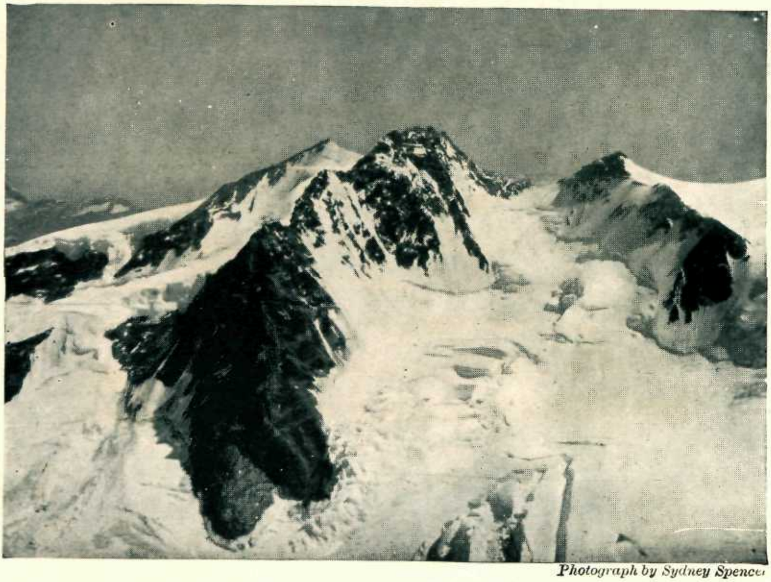
+ Louis Charles,
Bishop of Salford

ROME, *January* 30, 1923



Photograph by Sydney Spencer

DUFOUR SPITZE AND NORDEND FROM THE PUNTA GRIFETTI



Photograph by Sydney Spence

DUFOUR SPITZE, ZUMSTEINJOCH, AND ZUMSTEIN SPITZE to be in reality the lower of the two. The difference in height between them is, as we can testify by experience, exceedingly small, and not easily determined by the eye.

"For, having climbed Monte Rosa by the ordinary route, but with guides strange to the mountain, at a time when the stone man on the Dufour Spitze was masked by a heavy fall of fresh snow, we walked over that summit, and began without a question the passage of the ridge leading on to the eastern peak.[1]

"Some progress had been made, when one of the party, looking back, detected the stone man, to which we then returned.

"Standing on the Dufour Spitze, it seemed to us impossible to assert with confidence its superior height. But, on the other hand, all those who have reached the eastern summit have, despite the natural bias they must have felt towards a contrary opinion, acquiesced in its inferiority.

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[1] The note here quoted refers to an ascent of Monte Rosa I made in 1869 with Sir F. Pollock. As far as I remember, the stone man marking the summit at that date was on a platform a little below the highest crag. The question raised here has been set at rest by the Swiss official measurements, as follows: The Dufour Spitze, 4638 metres; Ost Spitze, 4633 metres; Grenz Gipfel (the knob where the spur and watershed meet), 4631 metres (see *Alpine Journal*, Vol. XXIX, p. 141). — D. W. F.

"The question, now attention has been called to it, admits of easy decision, but we shall be surprised if the established verdict is reversed."[1]

Seeing that we were on the Ost Spitze in the evening of the 30th, and again in the morning of the 31st, and that we crossed over from it to the Dufour and back again in the course of a few hours, our opinion may be of some little value. For this reason we express it, without putting forth any claim whatsoever, either to decide the question or to establish or reverse verdicts of any kind.

It seemed then to all of us that here, too, the truth lay halfway between the two extremes of opinion, as expressed by different observers.

I say "seemed," because, in the case of such a relatively minute difference of level, it would be unreasonable to bring forward the evidence of a small aneroid, which could not measure such difference, and could not be considered a very accurate instrument.

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[1] *Alpine Journal*, Vol. VI, No. 41.

All the same, it really did appear to us, first, that the Ost Spitze is not the highest; secondly, that neither is the stone man on the Dufour at the highest point; thirdly, that between the Ost Spitze and the stone man, and quite close to the latter, there is another point, which is very slightly higher than the stone man, and considerably higher than the Ost Spitze.

Gadin, whom I consulted by letter, in order to verify the accuracy of my memory in several particulars, though not in that one, referred to this matter of his own accord, confirming my opinion on these three points, and concluding in his French, which I quote: "J'ai bien observé cela."

Mr. Freshfield would seem to have meant to express an opinion exactly similar to ours, when he wrote that, leaving the spot on which the stone man stood, he began the passage of the ridge leading on to the eastern peak.

After all, perhaps we should take into consideration the possible changes in level brought about at the top of Monte Rosa by the snow.

Such changes are certainly not wont to be very marked even on the highest peaks. But Mr. Freshfield speaks expressly of fresh snow on the Dufour as being so deep as to cause him to pass the stone man almost unawares.

Again, anyone who reads attentively the accounts of ascents hitherto accomplished may notice, in their references, hasty and scanty though they be, like ours, to the general aspect of the ridge, a diversity of opinion among those who crossed in the same direction from the Ost Spitze to the Allerhöchste.

But I am anticipating events.

Here we were on the Ost Spitze, but we were unable to remain there long. Driven by the wind, which was now insufferable, and by approaching night, we soon began to descend, till we found, about thirty metres lower down, a projecting rock which was almost free from snow, and there we took up a position as best we could.

It was 8.30 P.M., and the aneroid showed a height of forty-six hundred metres above the sea.

The spot where we were was not indeed one of the most comfortable, and for people who had spent the day as we had, it was certainly not as good as the beds and the comforts of the Riffel. On the other hand, it was perfectly safe for anyone who was reasonably sure of himself, though it was extremely small.

It was impossible to take a step in any direction. Anyone sitting down found his feet dangling in space; we had, however, every facility for stamping them, provided we were careful not to lose our balance. And these elementary gymnastics were most necessary.

The cold was intense; without being able to reckon the exact degree, I may mention that our coffee was frozen hard, and our wine and our eggs resembled it, in that they were neither respectively drinkable nor eatable.

We again had recourse to our chocolate, and to a generous quantity of excellent *kirsch*, which we still had with us.

In such a place and at such a temperature, it would have been the height of imprudence to allow sleep to overcome us.

But who would have slept in that pure air, which pierced our marrow, and in face of such a scene as we had before us?

At the height . . . in the centre of the grandest of all the grand Alpine theatres . . . in that pure transparent atmosphere, under that sky of deepest blue, lit by a crescent moon and sparkling with stars as far as the eye could reach . . . in that silence . . .

Enough! I will not try to describe the indescribable. Both Professor Grasselli and I are firmly convinced that Nature is very unlikely ever to vouchsafe us a grander, a more magnificent spectacle.

We felt ourselves to be in the presence of a novel and most imposing revelation of the omnipotence and majesty of God. . . . How could we even think of the fatigue we had endured, much less complain of it?

And there are many mountaineers (I know it well, both from what I have read and from what I have heard them say) who have felt in their hearts (as we did that night) the profound truth of the line which says:

> "Del mondo consacrò Jeova le cime!"

We stood there absorbed in our thoughts, when the perfect silence was broken by a sound like a mighty thunderclap.

It was an avalanche which was breaking loose and falling below us, but too far away to cause us any trouble.

Awestruck and amazed, we listened attentively to the terrible sound of destruction, the sight of which was denied to us, as the mass, ever increasing in volume, hurled itself downwards, with "un fracasso d' un suon pien di spavento," as Dante says, till it came to rest on the lower glacier. When silence was first restored, it seemed to us more profound and more solemn than before.

And we were to have the opportunity of enjoying from that height the spectacle —

everywhere a beautiful one — of the dawn of a splendid day; we were to witness the first diffusion of light, to see the loveliest tints growing in the east, the sun appearing in splendour between the summits, and its rays spreading like a fiery mantle over a thousand peaks, and creeping down a thousand slopes of ice and snow, lighting them up with a wondrous medley of splendid tints!

It was enough to drive a painter mad... and for us it was time to be moving, and to climb the peak once more. The evening before we had been able to make a fairly exact estimate of the difficulties which we still had to overcome. Nevertheless, in order to move quicker and more safely, we left at the gîte the whole of our scanty baggage (the bulk of it had been sent to Zermatt by the Weissthor), taking with us nothing but the remaining axes and the rope.

It may have been four-forty-five or five o'clock when we left our sleeping-place, and, numb as we were, we took at least half an hour to climb up to the Ost Spitze again. This peak is connected with the Dufour by a narrow ridge, the crest of which consists of frozen snow and slabs of gneiss, broken here and there by projecting rock.

Placing our feet now on one side, now on the other, at times literally straddling the ridge, and at last carefully climbing round a block and crossing a narrow and very steep gully which runs down to the Swiss Monte Rosa glacier, we found ourselves at length assembled round the stone man which stands on the Dufour peak.

It was 8.20 A.M.

The weather was still splendid, the atmosphere perfectly clear; I leave it to the reader to imagine the view from that height of over forty-six hundred metres, which is only surpassed by Mont Blanc, and there only by one hundred and seventy metres, a difference which was rendered almost indistinguishable by the distance.

Meanwhile, however, both the cold and the wind were still with us. We swallowed a little chocolate instead of the traditional champagne, and, after putting a short report of our all-Italian ascent in a bottle which we found in a chink of the stone man we immediately began to think of our descent.

The tracks, still perfectly plain, of the last party from Zermatt showed us the route most usually followed on the Swiss side. We were tempted to adopt it, in order to avoid returning over our ridge, which was really difficult.

But, all things considered, we thought it better to go back to our gîte and collect the few things we had left there, and especially to try to recover the axe, the lack of which was increasingly felt by my friend.

We therefore went back along the ridge, returned over the Ost Spitze to our gîte, took up our sacks, and then descended (following roughly the route taken on the ascent) by the rocks to a point a little lower than the Zumsteinjoch (about forty-four hundred and fifty metres).

Our men having failed in their attempt to recover the lost axe, we ascended to the Col itself, about half-way between the Dufour and the Zumstein peaks, reaching it about 1 P.M.

Far below us lay, smooth and easy, the Grenz or Frontier Glacier; but it was separated from a very steep rock-pitch by a wide crevasse, which stretched right across as far as the eye could see, and, resting on those rocks, there ran right up to us one of the steepest snow slopes I have ever seen.

Many climbers have undoubtedly examined that wall at close quarters, and some will have climbed it in their ascent of the Dufour on its southwestern side.

The strong and icy wind did not admit of our standing for a long discussion; I was, however, very curious to see how Gadin would get us out of the difficulty. "Faites comme moi, Monsieur," he said to me; and I saw that he began to descend backwards, with his face to the slope, making large holes in the snow with feet and hands, but taking great care first of all to dig in his axe as deeply as he could.

Readers will understand that we had to descend backwards, as on a ladder.

And we did descend, I do not know for how long, but, as it seemed to me, for a very long time.

We next passed the rock pitch, not without difficulty, working our way down, and bearing somewhat to the left, where the approach to the glacier seemed rather easier. There only remained the crevasse to cross, from which we were now divided but by a moderately steep slope of good snow. We hoped, in time and with patience, to find a place where the crevasse was somewhat narrower, or where there was a firm bridge across.

Gadin suggested a quicker and an equally safe plan. He first of all, and then the rest of us, moving one at a time and taking the whole length of the rope, while the others stood ready to hold on if necessary, sat down on the slope just above the crevasse, first sliding and then leaping over the chasm, and so finally we found ourselves buried in the soft deep snow which covered the underlying glacier.

We had passed a place in a few minutes which might have cost us some hours.

When we reached the glacier, we felt like people setting foot at last on a broad, comfortable highway, after wandering on paths of disaster.

So we had not only descended the rocks of the Dufour peak on the Italian side, but crossed the pass which lies between the Dufour and the Zumstein peaks, a pass which would, if less difficult, be the natural route between the Monte Rosa glacier on the Italian side and the Grenz glacier on the Swiss.

The expedition accomplished by us, under the influence of the special circumstances attending it, may, as I pointed out at the outset, be of a certain importance in the mountaineering history of Monte Rosa, because ours would appear to be the first traverse of the Zumsteinjoch, which is perhaps the second highest pass in the Alps.

As regards our descent of the rocks of the Dufour peak, there can be no doubt that it was the first. I have already mentioned the forced descent by Herr Strauss and Ranggetiner from the base of those rocks downwards;

it therefore follows that Herr Strauss and we between us have accomplished the descent of the whole eastern face of Monte Rosa.

From my previous knowledge, which seems to me to be confirmed by all the Alpine writings that I have been able to consult, it would appear to be a fact that the pass had not only never been crossed, but not even reached from the Macugnaga side, and that it had only been attained (or nearly so) three times from the Zermatt side, and each time by an English party.

First of all it was reached by Messrs. F. P. Barlow and G. W. Prothero[1] on the 31st of August, 1874, with G. Carrel and Peter Taugwalder as guides, when they ascended the Dufour peak by this pass and along the ridge which leads from it up to the Ost Spitze.

A short report of this expedition was only published four years later (February, 1878) in the *Alpine Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. 59, p. 400.

In the meantime, the same expedition had been repeated by others, who, indeed, believed themselves to be the first to carry it out.

---

[1] The late Sir G. W. Prothero.

On the 23d of July, 1877, Messrs. W. M. Conway[1] and G. Scriven attained the pass, and from it ascended the Dufour peak, and soon gave an account of the climb in the *Alpine Journal* (vol. VIII, No. 58, p. 338).

This brought about the publication of a notice, in the following number of the *Journal*, which established the claim of Messrs. Barlow and Prothero to be considered the pioneers.

I extract from Conway's account the part which refers to the route as far as the pass.

Messrs. Conway and Scriven, with Nicholas Knubel and P. J. Truffer as guides, left the Riffel Hotel at 2.20 A.M., and went up the Grenz glacier by the ordinary route, towards the Lysjoch. At 6.30 they halted at the foot of the rocks by which the Dufour peak is usually ascended. Starting again at 7.15, they mounted that branch of the glacier which comes down from the saddle between the Dufour and Zumstein peaks, and by 8.30 they had already reached the rocks at the head of that glacier. Bearing somewhat to the left, they then climbed to the top of these rocks, and at 9 o'clock they were on the crest of the ridge, with the aforesaid saddle below them on the right.

---

[1] Sir W. M. Conway.

On the 22nd of July, 1886, the same saddle was reached by Mr. W. A. B. Coolidge and Mr. Conway himself, with Chr. Almer the younger, and from it they ascended the Zumstein peak.

The account of this expedition published in Vol. XIII, p. 126, of the *Alpine Journal* states that the party returned to the Riffelalp by the route already described by Messrs. Conway and Scriven.

I do not know whether any others have attained our pass by the Grenz glacier route, and, the question being now of no importance, it is quite natural that nothing more should have appeared in print about it, whereas the lack of any kind of reference to the question whether the pass has ever been climbed from the Macugnaga side bears out the supposition that we were the first to reach it from that side and to cross it.

With regard to the name to be given to the pass, the Swiss map (Siegfried) calls it the Grenz-Sattel; in the Monte Rosa section (1:50,000) of Sheet 29 of the new map of the Royal Italian Institute of Military Geography it has been left unnamed, and this is not surprising, for of the few passes in the principal Monte Rosa group, the only one named and measured is the Sesiajoch, and neither the Jägerjoch, the Silber-Sattel (or Ranggetiner Pass), which is the highest in the Alps, nor even the broad, easy, and, one may say, much-frequented Lysjoch, is even named.

I need not add that our pass is not mentioned by name even on Sheet No. 29 (Monte Rosa, 1 : 100,000), which has recently been published. The same fate has attended the other passes in the group, including the Sesiajoch.

In the accounts given by the *Alpine Journal* of the three aforesaid expeditions, we see that in the first two the name of Zumstein-Sattel is adopted, whereas Conway, whose "Zermatt-

Pocket-Book" (London, 1881) gives their routes, among the others, always calls it in this book the Grenz-Sattel. The report on the third ascent also uses the name of Grenz-Sattel.

In Luigi Vaccarone's "Statistics of First Ascents" (*Bollettino*, 1885, Monte Rosa group, No. 29) the name of Zumstein-Sattel is adopted; in the *Bollettino* for 1886 (*ibid.*, Nos. 26 and 105[2]) occurs that of Grenz-Sattel, and the same in the "Guide to the Western Alps" (Alpi Pennine), pp. 106–107, and 154–155.

I now learn that Vaccarone, being about to publish a third edition of the said "Statistics," intends to give the preference to the name of Colle Zumstein, for reasons which I consider excellent.

In the first place, this name is most suitable for our pass, because it is taken from the peak between which and the Dufour the pass lies, and because it is the name of an Italian[1] who was one of the first to ascend that peak.

---

[1] F. Zumstein, a Piedmontese, and an inspector of forests at Gressoney, who made the first ascent of the peak with G. N. Vincent on the 12th of August, 1819.

Secondly, the name of Grenz, or Frontier, Saddle, if it is given because the col is on the frontier ridge, does not seem any more applicable to this than to other gaps on the frontier; if it refers to the Grenz glacier, on to which one of the slopes descends from the pass, it is still less suitable, because the branch of the glacier which issues from that slope is only a secondary one; indeed, from this point of view, the name of Grenz-Sattel might much more correctly be given to the saddle between the Zumstein Spitze and the Punta Gnifetti, from which the main stream of the Grenz glacier flows, and which, moreover, has no name at all.

Therefore, as the pass in question has been given two names, of which one is unsuitable to it, but would fit another saddle much better, whereas the other name suits the pass well, it would seem reasonable to retain the latter for it, and transfer the former where it belongs.

If we, as the first to traverse the pass, may be allowed to exercise the right to give it a name we wish to support Vaccarone's arguments, and we propose to call it, and do call it, the Colle Zumstein.

The Grenz glacier drops for a long way in great terraces like an immense staircase; it is flanked by snowy peaks and slopes, broken at intervals by black rocks, the whole forming a noble parapet.

It was a regular desert of snow; and I recollect how those lines of Salmini's were recalled to my mind:

"Neve, neve, sempre neve,
Fredda, muta, fitta, lieve,
Un altar che cava gli occhi,
Una bianca vertigine."

Lower down the glacier assumes the aspect and the movements of a majestic, widely winding river, and flows down to the meeting-place in the vast Gorner basin, where at least ten glaciers, coming from the Weissthor, the Nordend, the Dufour, the Twins, the Schwarzthor, the Breithorn, and the Little Matterhorn, have their stately rendezvous.

In that vast theatre of lifeless nature, we felt as if we must disappear and be lost.

And the best of it was, that if we were not exactly to be lost, we were certainly to stray from our proper path.

We knew quite well that there were paths leading by the Riffelhorn and the Gornergrat to the Riffel hotel, and Gadin knew it likewise; but, whether his memory failed him, or whether his eyes, half-blinded by the glare of the snow, refused to render him due service in those unknown surroundings, it came about that he looked for a path where no path was.

Also, we were walking (except for the elementary precautions which are always necessary on a glacier) as people who know themselves to be near home, and see no necessity for much hurry. We halted a comfortable time at the place called Plattje, and there we were at last able to slake our thirst, which had long been tormenting us without mercy and without relief, for it is well known that snow is no remedy.

Meanwhile the sun had passed the meridian, had sunk to the west, had disappeared, and still the path failed to appear.

We passed from one glacier to the other, we climbed up the moraine to reconnoitre the rocks of the Riffelhorn at closer quarters.... Still no path!

Meanwhile the light was failing, and at length it grew quite dark.

We relit our one remaining lantern (the other had ended as a victim to the call of duty), but all in vain.

Anyone who knows what a great moraine is like, what a picture of chaos it presents, will have some idea of our wanderings to and fro.

In short, all our search was fruitless, as was a reconnaissance carried out by the excellent Proment.

Only a few yards from the comfortable beds of the Riffel, we were forced to be content with passing the night on the hard stones of the moraine.

This was a small matter compared with what we had gone through, and, after all, we could well consider ourselves lucky.

During all this long time, and in such conditions as have been mentioned hitherto, we had not met with a single real danger, not one serious incident had occurred, not a foot had slipped.

Even if our present predicament could be called unfortunate, it was only right and reasonable to put a good face upon it.

Accordingly, we did so, and, choosing a place that was more comfortable and sheltered from the stones that might fall from the rocks above, we went to sleep just as the lamp refused to serve us any longer, and we slept peacefully, to the great benefit of our limbs, which by now were very well entitled to feel fatigued.

I said above "a real danger," and, in order to avoid misunderstandings, I hasten to explain the words for the benefit of those who may need explanation, and to the extent of that need.

By the words "real danger," then, I mean (and we must understand the actual circumstances, because otherwise the most trifling actions and things may be called dangerous) those conditions which are presumably not to be faced with impunity, either because of something inherent in themselves, or in him who goes out to meet them.

Now it would seem to us a deliberate exaggeration to speak of real dangers braved or incurred by us — that is, in our own actual case.

And as for the very real and by no means small difficulties with which we had met, I quite believe Gadin, who told me he had experienced much greater ones on other climbs.

It is clear from the respective accounts of nearly all the expeditions previous to ours, that the climbers met with dangers which were both real and serious; but they also show plainly, if I am not mistaken, that the mountain or the weather, or both, were in very different condition from what they were with us.

Undoubtedly for high mountain ascents certain external and internal or subjective conditions are indispensable (as, indeed, they are, proportionately, for everything, if it is to be done properly).

The former conditions are, if not always, at any rate in some cases, sufficiently visible and tangible to give reasonable certainty; the latter can only be obtained and adequately ensured by a graduated course of personal experience.

When they are both found together, there are few recreations which are more wholesome for body and mind, and more to be recommended than a little mountain climbing. Clearly, the ascent of Monte Rosa by the east face is much more than "a little mountain climbing," and we thoroughly agree with our predecessors that this expedition is one that does not allow of the least lack of strength or care.

We were awakened from our deep sleep by the voice of Gadin, informing us that Proment had found the path a little above us, and that we had better go and join him at once.

We did not require telling twice, and we remounted the glacier and reached the Riffelberg.

It was time we did so; Gadin's eyes could have stood no more.

At the Riffel we enjoyed a perfect flood of refreshing new milk, amid the curiosity and the wonder of all who were present. The curiosity and the wonder were most natural, for a report of our expedition had reached Zermatt from Macugnaga by the Weissthor, together with our baggage, and we were expected at the excellent Hôtel de la Poste.

In view of our non-appearance (the reader now knows the reasons for our delay), a telegram had been sent to the Riffel to enquire about us.

It therefore behoved us to go down to Zermatt as soon as possible, and we did so after about three quarters of an hour's halt, leaving Gadin behind, however, so that he might pay some attention to his eyes, and then join us at his leisure.

Duty and inclination both bid me express gratitude, also on behalf of Professor Grasselli and Gadin, to the staff and guests of the hotel, and especially to an English gentleman whose name I am sorry not to know, for their kind and beneficent treatment of our guide.

He stood greatly in need of it, and he thoroughly deserved it, just as he deserves a final word from me, giving some expression to the satisfaction of both Professor Grasselli and myself with all he did on this expedition, and especially on the 30th of July.

I only repeat words which a famous mountaineer, Edward Whymper, once wrote about Michel Croz, one of the greatest guides in the Alps, and which seem also to fit Gadin exactly: "Could he have performed the feats upon the boards of a theatre that he did upon this occasion, he would have brought down the house with thunders of applause." [1]

Neither the length of our ascent, nor the varied contretemps of the descent, can persuade me that the praise I accord to Gadin is exaggerated.

Anyone who takes a comprehensive view of the separate details of my account, and considers as a whole our route on the ascent, will easily see that, apart from the minor troubles we underwent, our security, which may be

[1] *Scrambles*, p. 260.

called absolute, was purchased by increasing the length of our journey.

The continuance of the fine weather and the cold allowed us, even persuaded us, to do that which might well have been dangerous on a hot day and in weather that was not so settled.

It is well known that, as a rule, high mountain climbs should be carried out in the shortest time possible. As for the descent, experts will have realised at once that it was impossible for us to reach the endless Grenz glacier except at a very late hour.

I am not aware (I mention the fact of my ignorance, though I have examined a good many of the authorities, but I do not wish to do anyone an injustice) that anyone else has ever gone to and fro (during the same expedition) on the ridge between the Ost Spitze and the Allerhöchste Spitze, nor am I aware that the rocks of the Dufour peak have ever been descended by others on the Macugnaga side, nor that anyone before us had traversed the Col Zumstein. The late hour, Gadin's trouble with his eyes, and our ignorance of the locality, are perhaps enough to explain satisfactorily why we spent a second night out almost on the threshold of the Riffel.

If we could have crossed that threshold before nightfall, it would certainly have been more comfortable and pleasanter, especially for us; but I must not say more praiseworthy, especially as regards Gadin.

His courage and skill were only equalled by his honesty and moderation when the question of payment was being discussed.

Also, we cannot but testify fully to our complete satisfaction with young Proment.

This account, such as it is, was already finished when certain foreign publications were brought to my notice, in which the difficulties and dangers of the ascent of Monte Rosa from the Macugnaga side are discussed.

The names of famous mountaineers and Alpine writers, both English and German, occur in the discussions; the most recent of these publications, as far as I know, date from the beginning of 1889.

Herr Schulz, in the account he gave of his climb, was charged with being dangerously optimistic, so that he might easily have brought about rash attempts and deplorable catastrophes.

Herr Schulz defended himself from the accusation, but admitted that he had not emphasized sufficiently the difficulties of the expedition. For the benefit of anyone who wishes to learn more about the matter, I quote here the principal journals which deal with it.

We are glad to know about these difficulties now, but were fortunate in not realising them before our expedition.

Our judgment of the condition of the weather and the mountain, on which our ascent must depend, was the calmer and the more objective, in proportion to its freedom from bias; and, at any rate, we cannot accuse Professor Schulz's optimism, with which he was perhaps rather unjustly charged, of having seduced us unawares.

I say "perhaps rather unjustly charged," because there is possibly a little pessimism in the accusation.

Naturally, I do not say this because it was on Professor Schulz's motion that the Leipzig section of D. Oe. A. V. refused to contribute to the cost of building the Marinelli hut, which he disapproved.

It was Professor Schulz himself who said it in No. 3 of the 1889 *Mittheilungen*, which I have quoted several times. In any case, as regards his personal opinion and judgment, Professor Schulz was the more unbiassed in that he had not been able to make use of the hut, because it was not begun till two years after his ascent of the Dufour peak.

I have said all this, because it seems to me to follow from Herr Schulz's defence, which was not only spirited, but straightforward and generous.

Even too generous, I think; as, for instance, where he concludes that, instead of "under no circumstances whatever" ("under no circumstances, however favourable": this was the formula in which Professor Bonney deprecated any fresh attempt to ascend the Dufour from Macugnaga, and in which Signor Kugy concurred) he would say: "Not as a rule; but only under specially favourable circumstances, which cannot be reckoned on with sufficient certainty and knowledge, and concerning which it is difficult to form a reasonably sure judgment, and almost impossible (generally speaking) to attain to an infallible one."

As regards ourselves, at any rate, we are convinced that we were never exposed to any real danger, and that we were right to be sufficiently confident and sure that such would be the case even before we started on the climb.

In the case of such expeditions as this, I admit that it is never easy to attain to such certainty beforehand, and that it is much more difficult with regard to the east face of Monte Rosa than for other mountains.

But I could not deny the possibility altogether, without being contradicted by the facts.

Gadin is entitled to all the credit of having seen and realised with clear, unerring insight the true conditions existing at the time.

And, if I mistake not, this insight, which I may call one of time and place, which is inseparable, but quite distinct, from the general conclusions which experience alone can supply, is one of the most valuable and most indispensable qualities of a guide.

I have never seen this quality so conspicuous as in Gadin; I could therefore feel no surprise when I read of the ascent of Mont Blanc by a new route (or at any rate a route followed in its entirety for the first time) as having been successfully accomplished by the members of the Turin section, with him and Petigax as guides, a few days after our expedition.

Moreover, it is thanks to this quality of his that we on our ascent took without hesitation a route which was certainly longer, but, in my opinion, undoubtedly safer, than those of our predecessors.

I have again mentioned the Marinelli hut....

I was aware of the opposition it had met with abroad, even during its embryonic stage; this opposition had been replied to briefly but most convincingly by the translator of Zsigmondy's account (Count Lurani), himself a well-known mountaineer.

It is only now, however, that I have learnt that the poor hut drew down upon the Milan section the same accusation, or nearly so, which befell Herr Schulz, and it seems to me that after enjoying the hospitality of the accused, it would be neither generous nor grateful on my part if I said nothing about the matter.

After Count Lurani's remarks, and the experiences of ourselves and others, in view of the ease and the ample attractions even of an expedition going no farther than the hut (these attractions are mentioned in the Milan section's circular of the 14th of January, 1885), it seems to me impossible that any suspicion can be expressed — even hypothetically — as to the Milan section having built the hut merely for the sake of encouraging repetitions of a dangerous enterprise; such a purpose would be most blameworthy, if it existed.

The above-mentioned circular does, certainly, speak of the ascent of the Dufour peak being made easier, and of all danger being set aside, by means of the Marinelli hut; and it may be admitted that such language may seem bold.

But, after all, I can see no harm in it.

No mountaineer, even if only just initiated into Alpine climbing and literature, could possibly be for a single moment in doubt as to the real meaning of such language, especially as intended by its author.

Moreover, I repeat that I do not think it possible to deny categorically that all danger may be eliminated in certain circumstances, however rare and however improbable they may be said to be.

Given such circumstances, which are naturally assumed to be present, it would have been quite legitimate to say that the hut facilitates the ascent and contributes to the elimination of the danger, in that it enables the climber to take advantage of those very circumstances promptly and with freshly renewed strength.

Anyhow. whatever may be said or thought

of the language in question, it obviously was not, and never will be, able to make the hut itself more of an encouragement than it is in reality.

Anyone who walks up to the Pedriolo Alp, and from there carefully examines the east face of Monte Rosa, will understand at once, even without going into the cemetery at Macugnaga, that it is not on the hut that a reasonable hope of a successful ascent of the Dufour peak can be based; that many other factors quite foreign to the hut, and independent of it, require consideration and decide the question of success or failure; and that, with regard to that question, the hut can only offer the advantage mentioned above, which, though limited, is not insignificant.

No, I am wrong: this poor hut of the Milan section can render a much more valuable service, which the section that built it was under neither the necessity nor the obligation of pointing out.

The hut, standing at a convenient and perfectly safe point of vantage near the tracks of the avalanches, enables the climber to watch his enemy at close quarters, and, if he should hear him stirring in the night, even if it be only in the neighbourhood of the dreaded couloir, to beat a safe and easy retreat, which would be, under those conditions, not only honourable but wise, and, as I think, a matter of duty.

We, as we had told each other in so many words, would certainly not have refused such an honour, however modest it might be.

After all, if there is any need to say so once more, the intention here has been to give an account, accurate if possible, but certainly honest, of a particular concrete case, and not to establish general rules or to give encouragement of any kind to any person.

I am far from attaching to our expedition any importance other or greater than the relative one which it may receive from the goodwill of lovers of the high mountains. I thank God for that He has allowed me to admire at close quarters beauties which are certainly amongst the greatest and the grandest in this visible world He has created. I am glad that we have been the means of filling no inconsiderable gap in the history of the Club Alpino Italiano; and I venture to hope that others may meet with such a concatenation of favourable circumstances that they may enjoy similar and even greater pleasure, not only in equal security, but also, if it be possible, as I believe it is, with fewer discomforts and difficulties.

Difficulties and discomforts, if faced under suitable conditions, and with the requisite precautions, disappear, leaving body and mind refreshed and strengthened, with an imperishable memory of those great and marvellous scenes,

> "che di vederli in me stesso m' esalto." [1]

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[1] Dante, *Inferno*, IV, 130.

CHAPTER IV

ASCENT OF THE MATTERHORN DIRECT FROM ZERMATT

CHAPTER IV

ASCENT OF THE MATTERHORN DIRECT FROM ZERMATT[1]

I HAD arrived at Zermatt on the 1st of August, 1889, with Professor Grasselli, after traversing (with him) Monte Rosa from Macugnaga over the Dufour peak, together with Giuseppe Gadin and Alessio Proment of Courmayeur.

If I proceed once more to bore the readers of our journal, it is entirely the fault of my good friend the editor, who says that unreported expeditions are on the consciences of the members responsible.

The 2d, as will be readily believed, was a day of rest; on the 3d, I began to be sensible of the presence of the Matterhorn, which is at Zermatt a real "influence." I made a reconnaissance almost as far as the new hut, and I enjoyed, in magnificent weather, the view from the Hörnli.

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[1] From the *Rivista Mensile* of the Italian Alpine Club, February, 1890, Vol. IX, No. 2, pp. 65–68.

The 4th was a Sunday, and was again a rest day, properly celebrated by the good Valaisans and a good many of the visitors to Zermatt.

About sunset, on my return from an easy walk, I ran into Francesco Bich of Valtournanche, a famous Matterhorn guide. It was soon agreed that he should accompany me on the climb, together with Gadin and Proment, to whom, as to me, it was quite new.

We started on the morning of the 5th, and at dawn we were at the Schwarzsee Hotel, a dependance of the Hôtel de la Poste, at which we were stopping, and situated two hours' walk above the village.

But the weather was changing for the worse, though not sufficiently to prevent the characteristic *festa* of Our Lady of the Snows, which it is customary to celebrate, amid a great concourse of clergy and people, in the lonely chapel near the hotel, at the edge of the lake.

I regret that I have no space or time to describe it, but if anyone else likes to betake himself to that spot on the 5th of August, he

Photograph by Sydney Spencer

THE MATTERHORN FROM RIFFELALP

Photograph by J. J. Eccles

THE MATTERHORN FROM THE RIFFELSEE

may be quite certain of enjoying a very fine sight.

Weather conditions inclining to improve in the afternoon, I spent the night at the Schwarzsee, but in vain, for on the morning of the 6th it was blowing hard, and the sky promised anything but good weather. About 3 P.M. we reluctantly decided to return to Zermatt . . . with our tails between our legs.

And behold, half-way down, we met one, two, three parties, on their way towards the Matterhorn with provisions for passing the night in the hut.

We argued that down in the valley they must have had some indication of approaching fine weather which had not yet become apparent in the upper regions.

I descended farther, and a cool, dry breeze, blowing up towards the heights, assured us of the truth. Our first thought was to return to the Schwarzsee, but we were too near the village; we decided, however, that if the favourable symptoms continued, we would start again for the Matterhorn at midnight, going straight on to the summit without stopping the night at the hut.

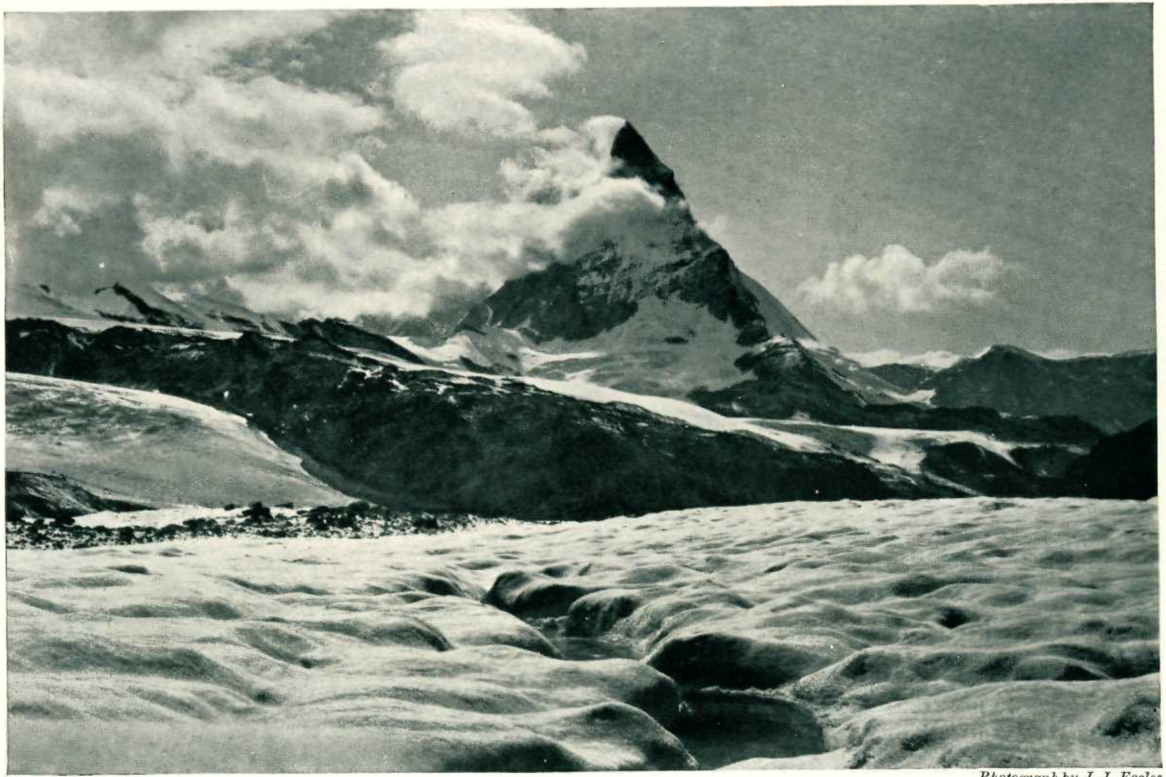
It was an experiment of some interest: and, at any rate, we should, if successful, have done the climb in our own way, and that an uncommon one.

By 2 A.M. on the 7th we were once more at the Schwarzsee; by 4.15 we had reached the new hut, having lost some little time on the way, owing to the darkness.

The parties we had met the previous evening had left the hut some time before. When we consider that, reckoning travellers and guides, they consisted of twenty people or thereabouts, it will be readily understood that we had not lost much by not sleeping up there. We stopped at the hut for rather less than half an hour, in order to eat something, and then we started up by the ordinary route.

We went from rock to rock, from ridge to ridge, from rope to rope, till, somewhat below the so-called shoulder, we met the other parties already on their way down.

We were warned by their guides that the



Photograph by J. J. Eccles

THE MATTERHORN FROM THE GORNER GLACIER

snow up above was not in good condition, and that in some places even the rocks were slightly coated with it.

The delay inseparable from the circumstances attending our expedition (I do not mention this with a view to describing our route) had already led us confidently to anticipate trouble up above, and we were now more than ever convinced of it; but where so many people had ascended and returned without any untoward incident, we thought we might well venture to go on.

If there ever was a day on which it was justifiable to take a risk, it was this one, so fine and promising was the weather.

So we continued on our upward way, but we strictly put into practice what Whymper wrote in his description of his first tragic ascent: "The work became difficult, and required caution."

We had reached the very spot to which Whymper referred in the sentence I have quoted.

As seen from Zermatt, it looks quite inaccessible: it is not really so, but it is only practicable for those who can depend absolutely on their sure-footedness and on the strength of their arms, especially in such conditions of the snow.

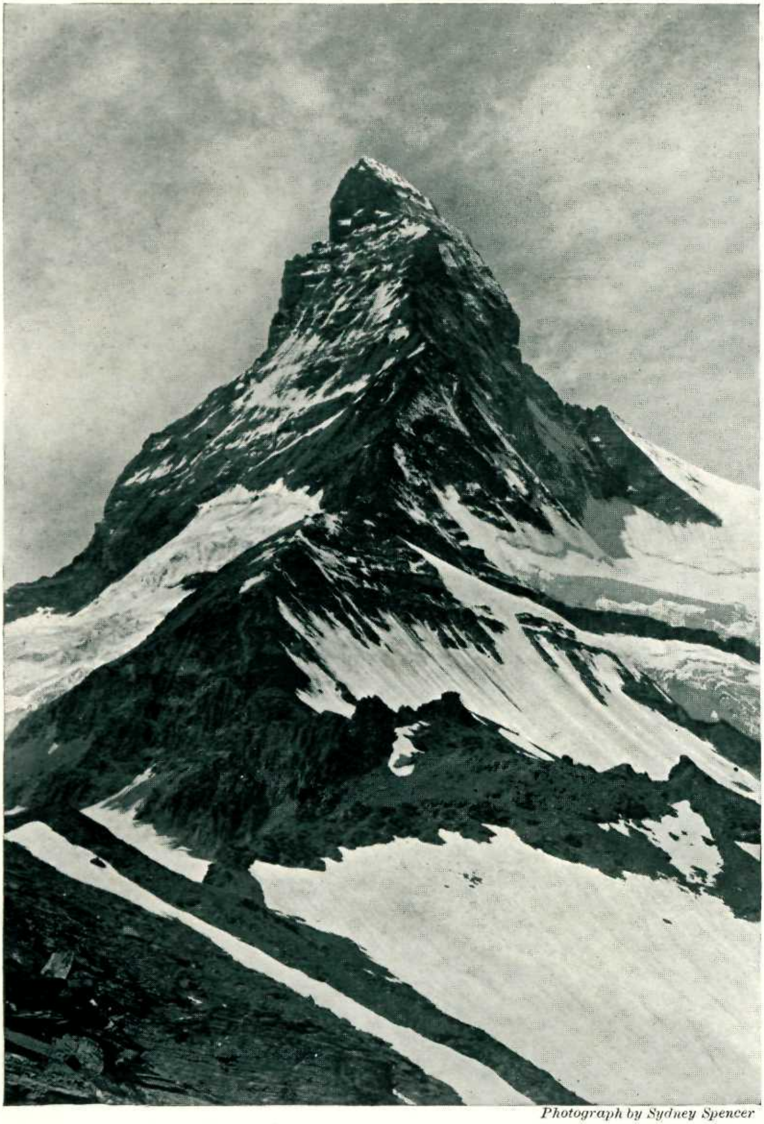
At last, about 4 or 4.30 P.M., we were on the top. The sun, sinking to its rest, was spreading its final splendour over the magnificent, indescribable scene. I shall never forget the awful beauty of the precipices which fall vertically from the summit on the Valtournanche side.

We saw at once that the snow and the verglas made an ascent from that side impossible for the time being.

But meanwhile the sun was sinking steadily, and an icy wind made us think of our descent.

Bich, who had hurt his foot, probably in some violent effort on the highest rocks, surrendered the first place to Gadin, behind whom I was placed.

We had descended only a short distance, when we became aware that the snow itself



Photograph by Sydney Spencer

THE MATTERHORN FROM THE HOERNLI

was beginning to feel the cold: it was getting coated with a kind of varnish of ice.

The need for discipline and care became ever more urgent: speed in the descent, for which the lateness of the hour seemed to call, must necessarily be sacrificed to security.

But on snow and ice Gadin was always in his element.

Only one of us moved at a time; in the most difficult places, when he thought I was firmly placed, Gadin merely told me to hold the rope taut, and I could see him below me, upright on the precipice, and swinging his axe with a skill and an accuracy which did not lack an element of grace.

Someone once asked me what would have happened if Gadin had by some accident fallen.

I replied that, if such a supposition could have presented itself seriously to anyone, it would have done so to me, but that it never did, or could, occur to me, knowing and seeing, as I did, how well Gadin worked.

But, after all, I verily believe that with our method of procedure, I could have held him unaided, as I had for several minutes held my companion (no light weight) on the Gran Paradiso two years before (in 1887), when before my eyes he fell off the topmost ridge on the side of the Glacier de la Tribulation.

We had for a short time hoped to reach, by some means or other, the old hut before dark, and to spend the night there.

It was not to be, however, and not far below the shoulder we decided that it would be best to stop.

The weather was still perfect, and we resigned ourselves to passing the night where we were, not only without regret, but, I venture to say, with considerable enjoyment.

The singular form of the Matterhorn, the perfect isolation in which its gigantic peak is thrust up through the air to heaven, the varied aspect of the country at its foot, made that night seem to me in some ways even more wonderful than the one I had spent a week before quite near the top of Monte Rosa.

We were all of us in the best of spirits. My men, Bich especially, were full of song, and their powerful voices, resounding in the lofty silence of that sublime solitude, gave me a most delightful impression.

The cold was intense, and, though we did not fail to clap our hands and stamp our feet, we felt that we should not be able to resume our descent until the sun had risen and restored our elasticity and strength.

At our leisure, therefore, we watched him rise and climb up into the sky, and then we made our way down to the old hut, and thence, after a short halt, to the new, where we lit a fire and refreshed ourselves in comfort.

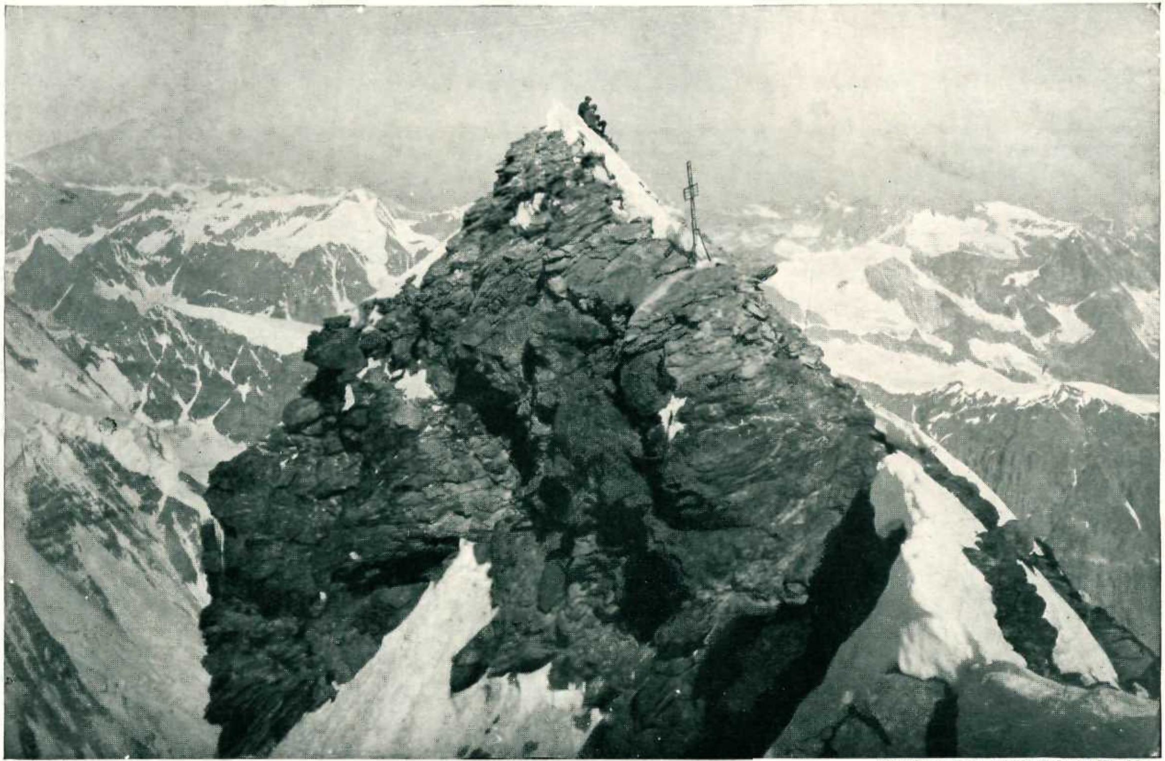
On arriving at the Hörnli, I was agreeably surprised to see Professor Grasselli, who had come up so far by himself to meet me.

At about 1.30 P.M. we were at the Schwarzsee Hotel; a couple of hours later we started and descended quickly to Zermatt, where we were awaited for a farewell dinner by the good parish priest, a learned and zealous Churchman, revered by his flock and esteemed by the visitors, who easily made friends with him by reason of his knowledge of several languages and his charming manner. He was a true type of the mountaineer, both in body and in mind, and a really good climber.

I will forgive the editor his exactions because he has given me the opportunity of mentioning my good host and friend, and of thanking him publicly for all his kindness and courtesy.

I had found Bich a cheerful travelling companion and an excellent rock-climber. It is not necessary for me to say any more in his praise, beyond quoting a remark he made to me about Gadin, which sufficiently proves his goodness of heart. He said, alluding especially to the first part of the descent: "Gadin is a very good man."

I have said all I have to say when I relate that on the next day, Friday, the 9th of August, we reached Valtournanche, two hours before nightfall, after fair halts at the so-called Forni and at Breuil. On Saturday, the 10th, we descended joyfully and swiftly to



Photograph by Alfred Holmes, Keighley

THE ITALIAN SUMMIT OF THE MATTERHORN

Châtillon, and by 5.30 P.M., on the same day, we were treading the pavements of Milan.

I had long wished to enjoy the spectacle of twilight and night in the high mountains. My desire was fully satisfied this year.

My few expeditions prove once more that, given good conditions of weather, and, I may add, of body and mind, it is possible to spend the *night out* with *impunity* at the *greatest* heights in the Alps.

The indescribable beauty of the surroundings, and the assured possibility of priceless experiences, which can only be enjoyed during a somewhat lengthy sojourn on the highest peaks, and then only at hours when one is least wont to be there, lead me to welcome most heartily the new hut — highest of all huts — which the C.A.I. is preparing to build on the Punta Gnifetti.

CHAPTER V

MONT BLANC: ASCENT BY THE ROCHER ROUTE AND DESCENT BY THE DÔME GLACIER

CHAPTER V

MONT BLANC: ASCENT BY THE ROCHER ROUTE AND DESCENT BY THE DÔME GLACIER[1]

On the evening of the 27th of July, 1890, Professor Grasselli and I were at Courmayeur, having travelled thither from Milan as the crow flies, I may say.

We wished to avenge ourselves for our failure on Mont Blanc two years before; and, in order that our revenge might be complete, we intended to attempt the *descent* to Courmayeur by the route that was first discovered and used on the *ascent* by Cav. A. E. Martelli and his friends of the Turin section, on the 16th and 17th of August, 1889.

Giuseppe Gadin and Alessio Proment, our old friends and guides, were expecting us. Gadin, who, with Petigax, also of Courmayeur, had guided the above expedition, was not only thoroughly favourable to our plan, but hoped

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[1] From the *Rivista Mensile* of the Italian Alpine Club, September, 1890, Vol. IX, No. 9, pp. 326–330.

(I must say now "believed," as I believed it till some weeks afterwards) that he could add to it a greater and more complete novelty, as will be seen from the short tale I have to tell.

On the 28th and 29th we took two fine training walks — the first up the Crammont on the Courmayeur side, the second to the Col du Géant.

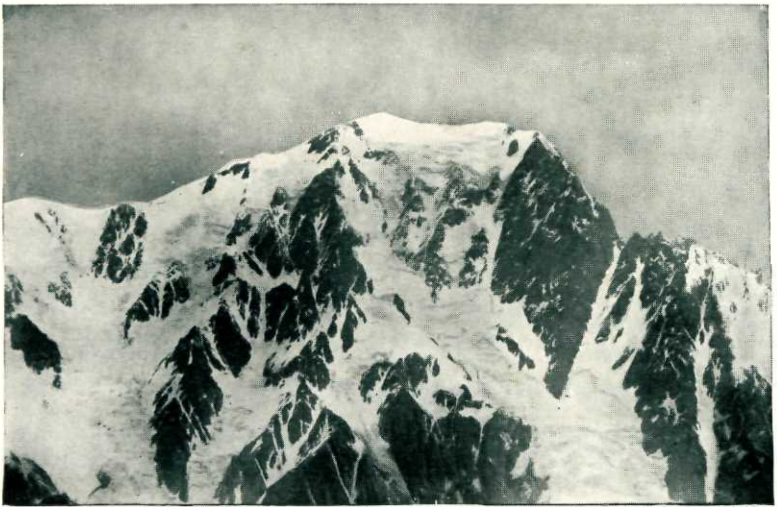
The second walk, which was made more interesting by the great quantity of snow, proved even more delightful to us on account of our meeting at the hut with that great mountaineer Avv. G. Bobba of Turin, who is now well known to all those who have read the last *Bollettino* of the C.A.I.

Who would have thought that that spot, which proved so delightful and so hospitable to us, was only a few days later to be fatal to the poor guide Brunod, and that this catastrophe was to be the prelude to a season memorable for disaster in the annals of the C.A.I., a season which deprived the club of a popular member and of some of its best guides?

At about eight o'clock on the morning of

Photograph by J. J. Eccles

MONT BLANC FROM THE SOUTH



Photograph by Alfred Holmes, Keighley

MONT BLANC FROM THE AIGUILLE DE TRÉLATÊTE the 30th, we set out on our way to the Rocher du Mont Blanc and the Sella hut, in weather that was fine and promised to become finer still.

Our party had received the welcome addition of the Reverend Giovanni Bonin, curate of Pré St. Didier, a vigorous native of the Val d' Aosta. Gadin assured us that he was as good as a guide, and the event proved him right.

We walked up at an easy pace, thinking thus to continue our brief training, and by 4 P.M., we were at the hut.

We had been preceded thither by Signor Carones, a fellow-member of the Milan section, with his guides, Petigax and Croux of Courmayeur, and we spent a joyous evening with them.

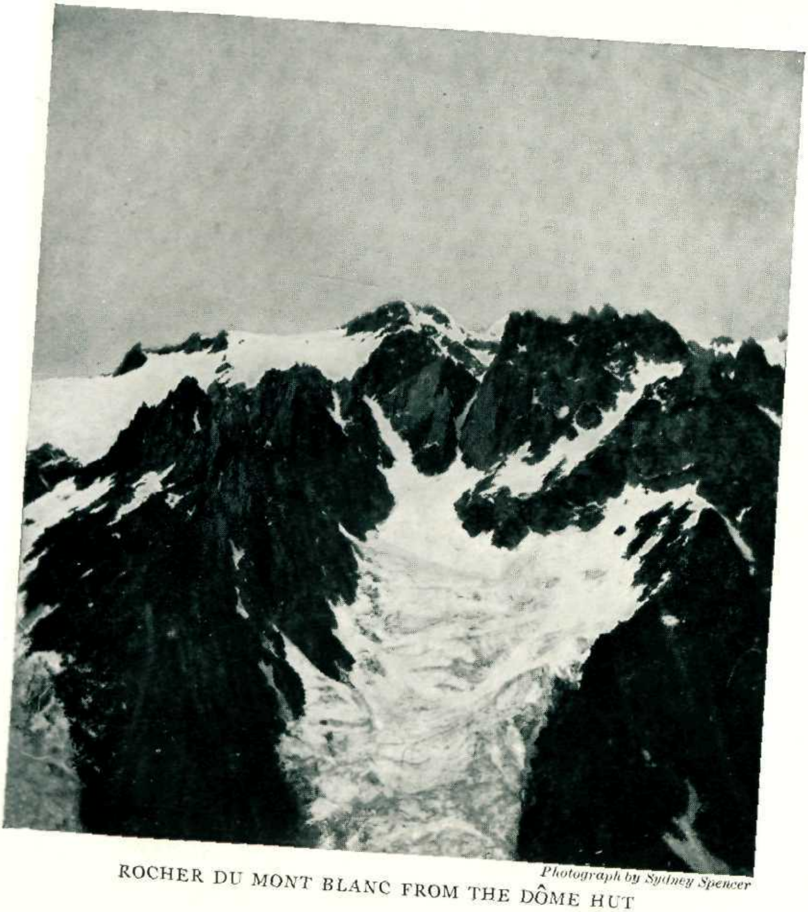
On the morning of the 31st the weather was splendid, and the mountain looked magical in the moonlight. Signor Carones started at 3 A.M., and we at 4. We caught him up on the rocks, and by noon we had all reached the summit by the ordinary route. Some sparkling Asti, quite priceless in that place, proved an excellent substitute for champagne.

Not a single cloud had marred our view of the most wonderful panoramas on our brief halts during the ascent.

When we reached the summit, the sky was still fairly clear on the French side, but on the Italian there had arisen a sea of mist which came up to within a few hundred metres of the summit. Our peak, and a number of lesser ones, stood out above the mist like islands, piercing the pure clear sky above with their bristling rocky precipices and their glittering ice and snow.

There was no wind, no trace of cold: it was even rather warm — "A little too warm," said Gadin.

And it was precisely the warmth, rather than the mist, which turned us from our purpose of attempting the descent to Courmayeur on the same day. This descent by snowy ridges and glaciers would have been a rash undertaking, hardly admissible, even if successful.



Photograph by Sydney Spencer

ROCHER DU MONT BLANC FROM THE DÔME HUT

Moreover, we had foreseen the contingency and had decided, if it should occur, to ask hospitality of the builders of the Vallot Observatory Refuge, whom we knew to be encamped underneath the Bosses.

Gadin was aware also that the hut was nearly finished, and that we should probably be able to pass the night there.

And so it turned out: we left the top at 2 P.M., and by 3.30 we were at the hut.

They were just giving the finishing touches, and M. Vallot was expected there with his wife on the following day.

This hut is known to be, for the present, the highest in the Alps (about 4460 metres). I say "for the present," because it will be surpassed by the Observatory Refuge which the C.A.I. is about to build on the Punta Gnifetti at 4559 metres.

Signor Carones intended to descend to Chamonix by the Grands Mulets. We spent the night at the hut (this, too, was something of a novelty), and, as far as I was concerned, a very good night too.

I have read in some description of an ascent of Mont Blanc that it is impossible to sleep in high Alpine huts on a great climb. During that night I slept seven good hours without a break; the night before, in the Sella hut, I had slept much less, because Gadin had been obliged to wake me much earlier.

I will not take up time in giving a minute description of the Observatory Refuge, especially as the Alpine journals have already dealt with it, and will do so again in the future.

It is (or at least it was when we were there) a small, very strong and very well-built construction of wood founded on rock, facing the snowy field or plateau which stretches between the Bosses and the Dôme du Goûter.

Measured by eye, I thought its area was about two and a half metres square, and its height about the same or a little more at the top — that is, at the angle formed by the junction of the two sides of the roof.

The interior, which is lighted by two small windows, has its capacity almost doubled by a floor which divides it at a height of little more than a metre from the ground. This explains how we, and others besides us, eight persons in all, were able to find room and to pass the night in the hut. What I cannot understand is what I read after my return in some paper, which described the Bosses hut as a capacious building with three rooms, consisting of the observatory, the kitchen, and the dormitory, the latter capable of accommodating I don't know how many dozen beds.

The Vallot hut, as we saw it and appreciated it, is admirable enough, without its being necessary to spread abroad incredible tales about it.

When I saw those workmen labouring in their hairy caps, their dark spectacles, their thick gloves and their enormous heavy boots, amid that immense theatre of snow and ice, I really thought I was reading an illustrated description of a polar expedition.

I only fulfil a duty in recording the tact, the civility, the true cordiality with which we were welcomed and treated, thanks especially to a Payot, one of the excellent and well-known Chamonix guides of that name, and the leader of the work.

We left the lofty and hospitable hut at 6 A.M. on the 1st of August, climbed up the Dôme du Goûter, keeping to the ridge, along which we proceeded for a short distance astride, and then descended to a point not far above the Col de Bionnassay, which lay before us, on our right.

Here, had we followed the route taken on their ascent by our fellow-members of the Turin section, we should, if I am not mistaken, have gone on to the cliffs and buttresses of the Aiguille Grise, which rise above the head of the upper Miage glacier, have crossed the glacier itself to its right bank, descended thence to a point under the Col de Miage, and then gone down by the glacier of that name.

The route lay quite clearly before us.

The explorers of August, 1889, had pointed out that the only difficulty, but a very real one, lay in the séracs of the icefall with which we should have had to deal after crossing the glacier, a difficulty not free from danger, owing to the continual threat from above.

It is true that for us, thanks to the early hour (it was 8 A.M.), only the difficulty remained, without the danger.

But a passage under séracs is always, and at all hours, to be avoided, if possible, especially on the Italian side of Mont Blanc, which is not generally very cold, on account of its favourable position.

This consideration led us most willingly to agree to the alternative suggested by Gadin, which I had mentioned at the very beginning, and which we now proceeded to attempt.

Instead of going on to the cliffs and buttresses of the Aiguille Grise, we turned at right angles to our left, and began to descend from its very beginning the Glacier du Dôme — the glacier, that is, which runs down between the Rocher du Mont Blanc on the left and the Aiguille Grise on the right.

I had found the name of Glacier du Dôme applied to it by Durier in the topographical map attached to his splendid book on Mont

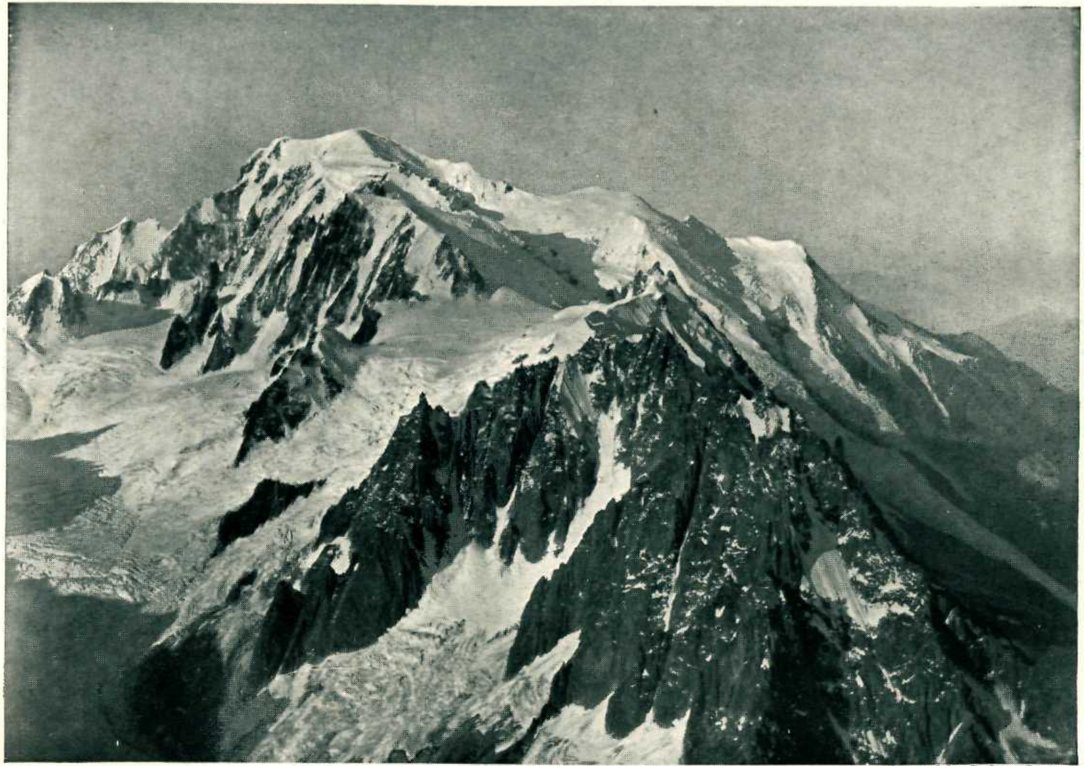
Blanc, which indicates the routes followed on the various ascents down to 1880.

I cannot, however, find any name assigned to our glacier in the other topographical maps, including those of Mieulet and Viollet-le-Duc, or even the new Italian map.

Though very steep at its head, and very much crevassed lower down, the Glacier du Dôme is no more difficult than many others which are much frequented. Nevertheless, I hardly think it would be wise, even if it were possible, to try and follow it down to its foot, or, rather, to its mouth, where it joins the lower Miage glacier.

Therefore, after descending for a couple of hours, keeping to the centre of the glacier, at about 10 A.M. we turned again at a right angle to its right bank, where we reached the rocks without difficulty and clambered up on to the crest of the spur which supports the final peak of the Aiguille Grise.

Gadin said he was sure of being able to descend on to the Glacier de Miage by the other side of this spur.



Photograph by Sydney Spencer

MONT BLANC FROM THE AIGUILLE VERTE

We were obliged to spend some time in looking for a possible route, but we found one at last, slightly above the lowest precipices of the spur, which were quite impracticable, and here we met once more with the first signs of grass, a pleasant sight after the white monotony of ice and snow.

By about twelve-thirty we were on the Glacier de Miage; and a short half-hour after that, where the glacier begins to be covered with loose matter, we halted, had something to eat, and drank our fill of water. By 5 P.M. we were at the Hôtel Mont Blanc at Courmayeur.

If it be remembered that at 6 A.M. we were still at the Vallot hut, and allowance be made for the precautions and the uncertainties which are inseparable from new routes (or routes new to the party concerned) in the High Alps, our route may perhaps be thought worthy of attention, especially as we are unable to point to any part of it as being, I do not say dangerous, but even really difficult or out of the ordinary.

The reader will certainly have noticed that no mention has been made of our route as a new one, save as one which we believed in good faith to be new.

My good faith — I should have said my ignorance — received an opportune shock and enlightenment from the author of the "Statistics of First Ascents." There is nothing further to be said; he is quite right, and he is quite the proper person to point out that our route had already been followed, likewise on the descent, by Messrs. Macdonald, Grove, and Buxton on the 7th of August, 1865, with Jacob Anderegg, P. Cachat, and the younger Taugwald as guides.

Mr. Macdonald wrote a full description of the expedition in the *Alpine Journal* (Vol. II, pp. 332–341), and a short extract was made by Durier (Vol. II, pp. 328–329), who apparently intended, in the map mentioned above, to indicate the route followed by the three Englishmen.

I say "intended," because the line shown by Durier seems to me very different from that referred to by Macdonald (Vol. II, p. 335, note).

According to the latter's account, he and his party descended the eastern branch of the two into which the upper Glacier du Dôme is divided; whereas Durier's plan mentions the western branch — namely, the one we took. It is perhaps worth while making this slight correction.

Besides justifying in part our claim to a new descent, it replaces in their natural position the "incredible difficulties" mentioned and portrayed (and, perhaps, somewhat accentuated in the fearsome illustration in the *Alpine Journal*, Vol. II) by Macdonald, and changed over by Durier in his map from one branch to the other of the Glacier du Dôme; for, I repeat, the branch we used, which is precisely the one indicated by Durier, confronted us with no difficulty out of the common.

It was only by losing their way in the bad atmospheric conditions that the three Englishmen came down the eastern branch of the Glacier du Dôme, and took twenty-four hours to reach the Glacier de Miage, while they had intended to descend by the route taken on their ascent by Messrs. Adams-Reilly and Birkbeck, who had left St. Gervais the year before, and had climbed the Dôme du Goûter via the Col de Miage

Gadin, who was most competently seconded by Proment, only strengthened the excellent opinion we had formed of him on our former expeditions.

On the following morning we started via Aosta for Milan, while Gadin again climbed by the Rocher du Mont Blanc the highest peak in the Alps, acting as guide to the daring, and now famous, "armed ascent," which also adopted our route on the descent.[1]

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[1] On the 3d of August, 1890, Mont Blanc was ascended and descended by the same route as Drs. Ratti and Grasselli's by a fully armed and equipped party of the Fourth Alpini, consisting of five officers and six other ranks.

CHAPTER VI

A MISADVENTURE WHICH BEFELL PRINCE E. GONZAGA OF MILAN AND HIS GUIDE, GIUSEPPE GADIN OF COURMAYEUR, IN THE VAL BELVISO

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GIUSEPPE GADIN, the well-known guide of Courmayeur, was at Milan on private business of his own, when he was requested by Prince E. Gonzaga of the Milan section to accompany him on the traverse from Bondione (in the Val Seriana) to the Valtelline.

They left Milan on the 30th of March last, and reached Bondione late the same night.

At 2.30 A.M. on the 31st, they left the village and walked up the valley on the left bank of the Serio. They intended to make their way up to the Piano di Barbellino, and thence to reach the pass by the Val Morta and to descend to Chiuso.

It was most unfortunate that the mutual

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[1] From the *Rivista Mensile* of the Italian Alpine Club, April, 1891, Vol. x, No. 4, pp. 127–128.

confidence engendered by the magnificent strength of the prince and the well-known skill of Gadin induced them to set aside the latter's suggestion as to the advisability of enlisting the services of a local man, in view especially of the quantity of fresh snow on the mountain.

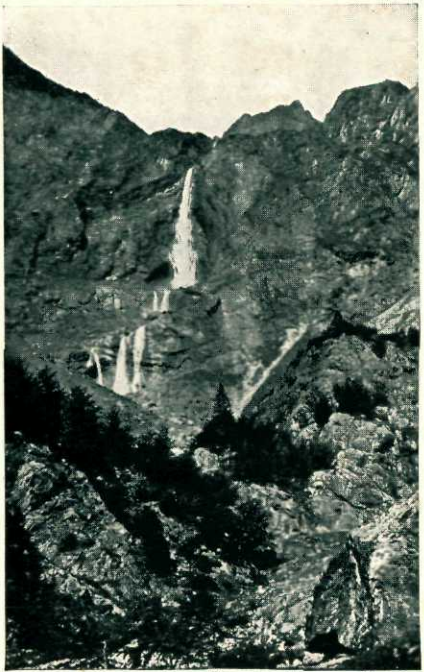
At sunrise they reached the top of the rock bastion down which leaps the great fall of the Serio. Under the conditions then existing they had a long, difficult, and wearisome ascent by an icy couloir, till they found themselves a few steps from the Barbellino hut (belonging to the Bergamo section).

From this point they were able to realise the enormous quantities of snow covering the plateau and the surrounding peaks.

But, though further progress seemed difficult, the descent by two men only, roped though they were, appeared to be very imprudent.

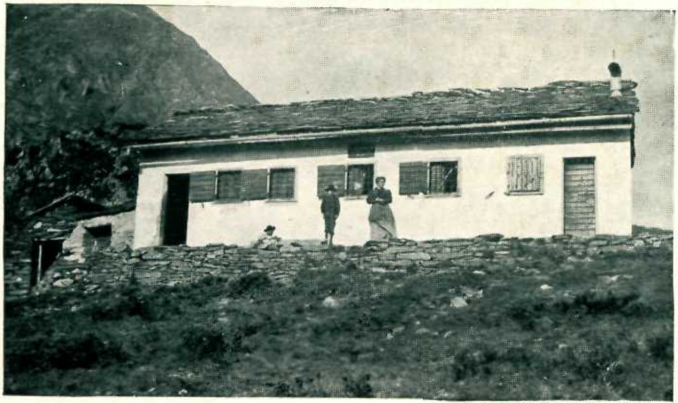
Soon after a snowstorm came on. Even at Milan the morning of the 31st was cold and wet and windy.

Driven by the storm and bewildered by the clouds of snow it raised, they began to make



Francesco Panzerini, Brescia

LE CASCATE DEL SERIO



Francesco Panzerini, Brescia

RIFUGIO CURO, CONCA BARBELLINO

their way up towards the Piano di Barbellino, thinking that this would lead them in the direction of their proposed destination. Instinct, it would seem, caused them to take the route that appeared to be the most open, the least in shadow, and the most practicable.

They ate a hasty mouthful about 10 A.M., and, their only anxiety being to advance as quickly as possible, in face of the serious hindrance of the snow and the storm, they kept on their way right up to the Barbellino lake.

This they found iced over, and so deeply covered with snow that they would not have noticed it had it not been for the smoothness of its surface and shores.

It was near sunset when the broad saddle lying between the Pizzo Torrena and the Pizzo Strinato became visible to my weary and bewildered friends.

Gadin, seeing the approach of night, proposed to go on alone, as quickly as possible, in order to cast his eye over the country lying on the other side of the pass, and, taking advantage of the last of the daylight, to form some idea of its nature. His plan showed foresight, and may have saved two lives.

When they were once more united on the pass, they could be in no doubt either as to what they must do or as to their direction. To stop where they were meant death; it was necessary for them to reach the bottom of the Belviso valley, which in its lower part is called the Valle di Pila, and, turning to the left, to keep on constantly down that valley.

And down they went — down all through the night, in complete darkness, ever on the snow, which was now icy, now powdery, now soft, ever careful not to lose one another, trying to avoid and to overcome as best they could the steep pitches of rock, ever on the alert not to slip, and not to be buried in the snow-drifts. In a word, it was a long and desperate struggle against the death that threatened them from so many sides.

The remembrance of this is the only clear impression that remains to the two who so narrowly escaped destruction. After about an hour's descent, the prince dropped his stick, and it was impossible to find it again in such darkness. Gadin handed him over his axe, which was destined lower down, though it broke in two, to check, though it could not prevent, a short fall.

When the sun rose once more, they were within sight of Tresenda, and it was only then, when the struggle for life was somewhat relaxed, that the prince's powers refused all further effort, though his endurance and courage had inspired Gadin with the greatest admiration.

Assistance was promptly afforded him, and he reached the village, but quite a superficial examination sufficed to convince them both of the serious and distressing realities of the position.

The prince's feet and the guide's right hand, to mention only the principal damage, were severely frost-bitten, and required immediate remedies.

Gadin, having called in the excellent local doctor, Signor Morelli, and having helped the prince to bed, started in a carriage for

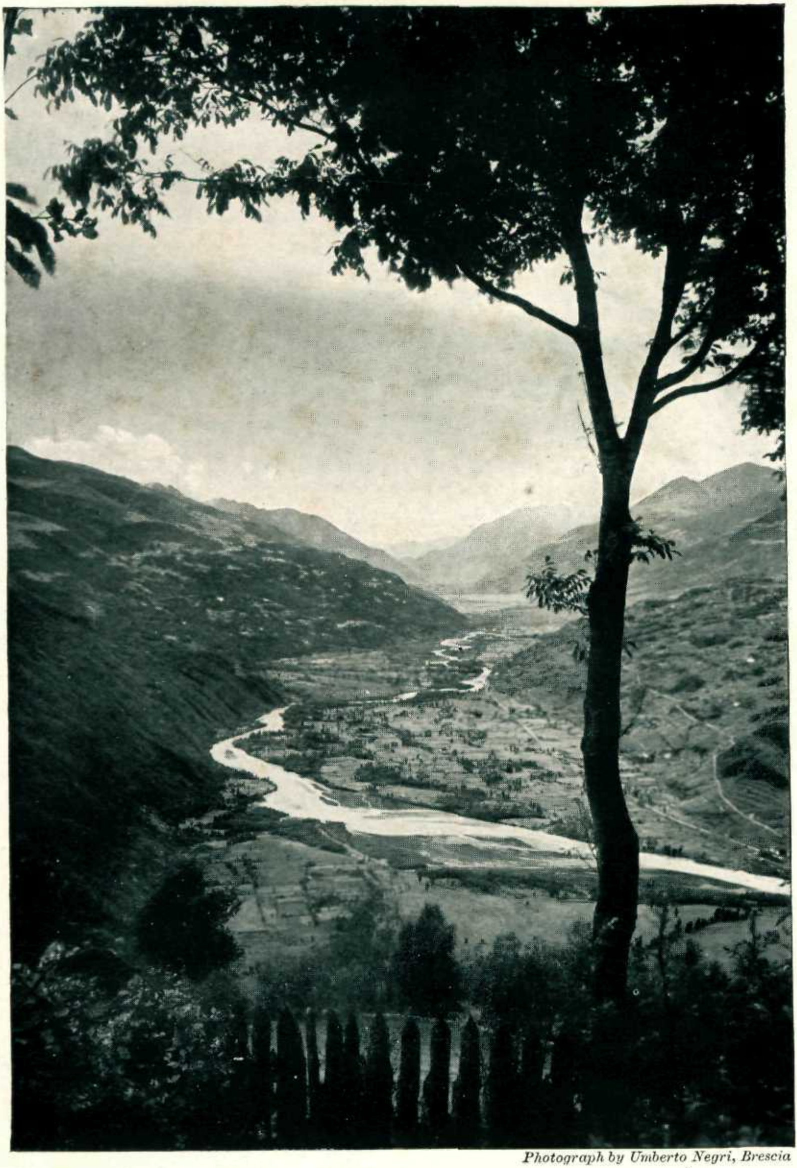
Ponte Valtellina, whence he sent a telegram to Milan.

On the following day, as he felt that his previous engagements required his presence, he proceeded thither himself, but not before he had returned to the prince, and seen for himself how the treatment was progressing.

This treatment was prescribed and carried out with so much zeal and skill by the abovementioned Signor Morelli and our worthy young friend Dr. Sormani, that it enabled the prince to be brought to Milan no later than the 15th of April with the certainty of a complete, if not an early, recovery.

It may not be without interest to mountaineers to learn the principal points of this treatment, which can be summed up in very few words: alternate massage with snow and compresses of spirits of camphor, followed by bandaging with cotton-wool and india-rubber, which latter, on Dr. Sormani's suggestion, was applied directly to the affected parts with immediate benefit.

Another form of treatment which is often



Photograph by Umberto Negri, Brescia

THE VALTELLINA FROM THE BELVEDERE ON THE PASSO D'APRICA adopted by doctors in Alpine centres, and which is usually successful, was seen by the writer to effect a complete cure two years ago in the case of a friend of his, though it was applied after two days' delay, and though the patient's condition was evidently much more serious than that of Gadin in the present instance. This treatment consists of continual compresses of spirits of camphor, supplemented by vaseline and baths of cold salt water.

Just two more observations, and I have done.

Some have wondered at so grave a case of frost-bite in the foot-hills; but similar cases have occurred even on the humblest of the Brianza hills. Moreover, it is sufficiently explained by my friends' long exposure to the snow and wind, which always bring in their train great falls in temperature.

The surprise of others at the loss of direction may seem to have more basis.

But, if wind and clouds of snow may be considered as at least equivalent to mist, there have been many cases more surprising still: Whymper, one of the boldest and best of mountaineers, with such guides as Croz and Almer, was caught by the mist while crossing the Col d' Hérens, and lost his way more than once, notwithstanding his determined efforts to keep in the right direction. Again, in 1865, three English climbers with first-class guides came down to Courmayeur on the Italian side of Mont Blanc, though they had intended (and indeed, believed themselves to be) descending on the French side to St. Gervais. Almost every winter at Milan, when the fog is thick, there are people who lose their way in streets whose every pebble is known to them. This being admitted, the aid of a local man would always have been a valuable precaution, but it is difficult to say how far it would have helped them, except by ensuring their return by the rocks of the waterfall.

After all, while my friends' mishap is only too rich in warnings for mountain-climbers; while the latter are enabled at the cost of the former to learn once more the necessity of certain precautions, to exercise a wider foresight in view of the events we have related, my friends themselves may congratulate themselves and thank Heaven that, having become honestly engaged in a truly formidable contest, *they fought the fight valiantly*, and came out of it wounded, it is true — a small matter for those who have contended for many hours hand to hand with death — but victorious.

THE END

CLIMBS ON ALPINE PEAKS

BY

ABATE ACHILLE RATTI

Mountaineer (*now* POPE PIUS XI)

TRAMVIE DEL COMUNE DI

MILANO

in esercizio alla

SOCIETÀ GENERALE ITALIANA EDISON DI ELETTRICITÀ

C 10 mi

CONSERVARE IL BIGLIETTO
E PRESENTARLO AD OGNI
RICHIESTA DEL PERSONALE

C 5 mi

281 E65791

IL PREZZO ORDINARIO DELLA CORSA È DI 10 CENTESIMI. NELLE ORE IN CUI IL PREZZO È RIDOTTO A 5 CENTESIMI, LA VETTURA PORTA CARTELLI INDICANTI LA RIDUZIONE, E IL BIGLIETTO DEVE ESSERE FORATO NELLA CASELLA INDICANTE IL PREZZO RIDOTTO.

Milano. Prem. Stab. Marco Spada & C.º Viale Magenta, 70.